

Rural Health Promotion

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Rural Health Promotion 2023-2024 Priorities

I am excited to share an update regarding the *Rural Health Promotion* program here in Whatcom County!

In the final months of 2022, I met with key community stakeholders and reviewed all recent community needs assessments developed by leading Whatcom County agencies. Through that assessment period, I have identified next steps for the *Rural Health Promotion* program development. In alignment with the strategic priorities of the College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS) at Washington State University, the primary objective of the Rural Health Promotion program is to promote resiliency for rural communities in Whatcom County.

Four strategic priorities to promote a more resilient Washington

- Builds a well-qualified and adaptable workforce
- Ensures affordable and accessible food for all
- Builds thriving communities, families, and individuals
- Strong stewardship of our natural resources

In this update, I share the top three program priorities for 2023-2024 and my planned activities to move this work forward. The priorities are the product of an intensive assessment of community needs, matched with an inventory of assets within my sphere of influence. This update is intended to start a dialogue, and I look forward to deepening the conversation about how we can promote rural health here in Whatcom County.

In community,

Shawna Beese
Assistant Professor &
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References

- * Community Health Improvement Plan 2022-2026 (March 2022); Healthy Whatcom
- * A Vital Bridge with the Community 2022-2025 Community Health Needs Assessment (2022); PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center
- * COVID-19 Community Health Impact Assessment for Whatcom County (July 2021); Whatcom County Health Department
- * COVID-19 Impact Assessment and Future Strategies (Spring 2021); A research project conducted by students in the Western Washington University Sociology course: Population Health Advocacy
- * East Whatcom Food Landscape Assessment -A Comprehensive Snapshot of Food Access in East County (Spring 2019); Whatcom County Health Department
- * Broadband Feasibility Study for Rural Whatcom County (February 2019); Port of Bellingham Washington State
- * Whatcom County Community Health Assessment (2018); Healthy Whatcom
- * Community Needs Assessment (2017-2018); Opportunity Council

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2023-2024 workplan

In the next two years, my work priorities will center on the following three broad categories:

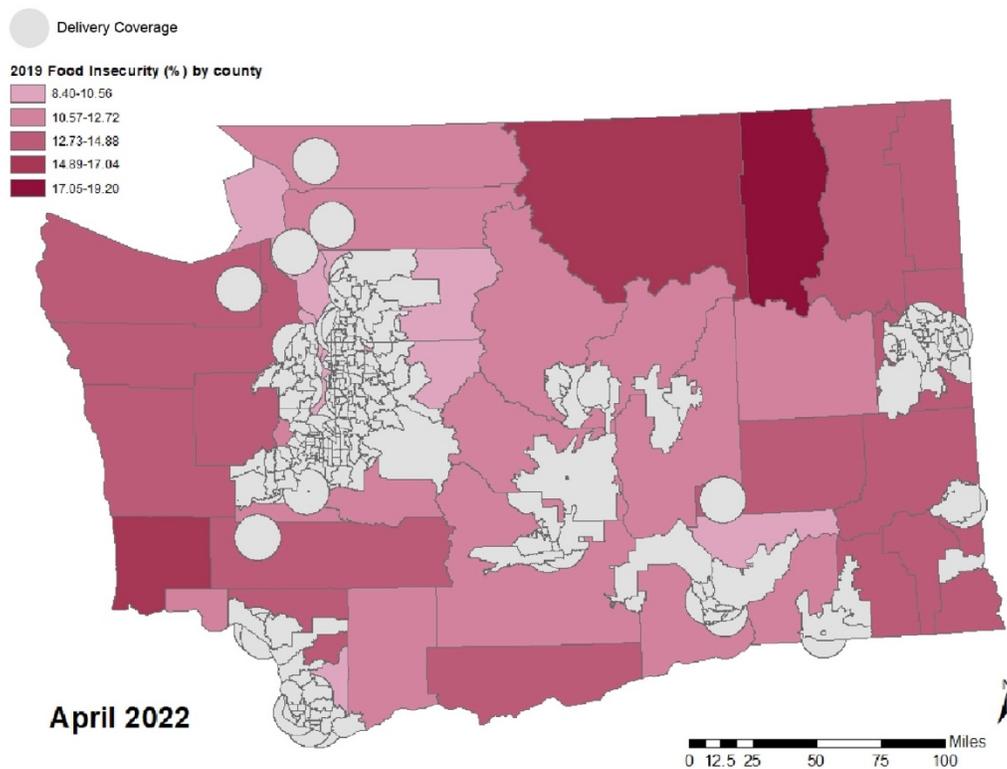
- * Research on neighborhood determinants of health and rurality
- * Projects to secure tools and services for Whatcom rural residents
- * Applied research toward the development of the *Rural Neighborhoods* program

Below is my detailed workplan for 2023-2024. Collaborators welcome! I am happy to answer any questions and discuss this plan further.

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Basic Research <i>-Rural neighborhood determinants of health</i>	Concrete Resources for Whatcom Rural Communities	Rural Neighborhoods Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study chronic stress burden in rural settings• Identify the risk and protective factors of neighborhood resilience• Examine how to develop safe and healthy neighborhoods• Study rural disparities in mental health access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Farm Stress <i>-rural resources to address emotional strain and suicide warning signs</i>• Retail food access <i>-advocate for increased retail access for East Whatcom</i>• WA-FOOD Survey <i>-to describe county-level food environments snapshots post COVID-19</i>• Broadband project <i>-development of county-level Broadband Access Teams (BATs)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Master Gardener (MG) emotional strain and suicide warning signs referral pilot study</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide MG volunteers with evidence-based response tools to respond to signs of emotional strain• provide MG volunteers with staff coaching if signs of emotional strain are encountered

Grocery Access: East Whatcom



In April of 2022, I completed the last of my three state-wide evaluations on access to online grocery purchasing for SNAP/EBT participants of Washington State (WA). At that time it was confirmed that WA had met the Farm Bill 2014/2018 benchmark of greater than 80% of the state having access. A secondary finding from my evaluation was that the rural disparity in online grocery access persisted.

When I arrived in Whatcom County last September, the lack of grocery access for East Whatcom still weighed on me. Fortunately, I found an outstanding group of community leaders that shared the concern. Over the next few months, our group nurtured a bold idea that Safeway corporate might be open to discussing innovative solutions to bring grocery access to East Whatcom. Specifically, we wondered if Safeway would be willing to enable their online grocery access to East Whatcom for weekly distribution to agreed-upon East Whatcom pick-up sites. This would cut the pick-up travel for East Whatcom residents by over 30 minutes!

Conversations are still ongoing with the Safeway corporate office as they assess the feasibility of the logistics. Safeway is considering adding pharmacy bundled distribution to the plan to increase feasibility. Our team is encouraged and engaged. I will update as commitments and details develop.

Team members:

Jessica Bee, EWRRRC Manager Early Learning and Family Services Opportunity Council
Noelle Beecroft, WSU SNAP-ED, Whatcom Program Coordinator
Ali Jensen, Program Specialist, Whatcom County Health & Community Services
Sam Norris, Executive Director Foothills Food Bank
Aly Robinson, Community Health Specialist, Whatcom County Health & Community Services

Farm Response Certified

In the first quarter of 2023, I became FarmResponse Certified. The FarmResponse certification has been casually described as rural cultural competency. The certification is intended to arm community and health providers with a holistic understanding of the challenges that agricultural producers, their families, and their communities are more likely to encounter.

FarmResponse Course Content:

- * The Total Farmer Health Model
- * AgriBusiness Factors Impacting Mental Well Being
- * Agriculture Work Factors
- * Family Dynamics
- * Agrarian Culture and Values
- * Special Populations
- * US Agricultural Producer Demographics
- * Agricultural Community Healthcare Challenges
- * Opioids and Alcohol Issues in Agriculture
- * Suicide and Agriculture
- * Resources and Referrals



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